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Thunder Basin and Black-footed Ferrets Talking Points August 14, 2018

- In 1994, the black-footed ferret captive breeding program was turned over to the USFWS (Service). The Service proposed that ferret reintroductions be suspended in white-tailed prairie dog colonies and that future reintroductions focus on black-tailed prairie dog colonies. This put the Shirley Basin reintroductions on hold and made releases on the Thunder Basin National Grasslands (TBNG) a priority.
- The Wyoming Game and Fish Department (Department) disagreed with this approach but coordinated with TBNG to ensure adequate ground work was conducted for potential ferret reintroduction. At that time, the Department terminated development of additional black-footed ferret release sites in Wyoming due to differences in opinion.
- Since 2001, when the Land and Resource Management Plan for Thunder Basin National Grasslands (TBNG) was finalized, there have been numerous conflicts regarding implementation of the plan with regard to black-tailed prairie dog management and black-footed ferret reintroduction.
- As detailed in the Land and Resource Plan, areas of the grasslands were managed specifically for black-tailed prairie dogs
 - This action resulted in landowner dissatisfaction due to a lack boundary control and the degradation of leased grazing allotments.
 - Thunder Basin instituted a shooting ban on key areas in March 2002 to maintain prairie dog populations
- In 2016 the USFS hired the Ruckelshaus Institute to moderate workshops to discuss prairie dog management issues.
 - These workshops had little public or landowner support.
 - A summary of these meetings can be found at:
<http://www.uwyo.edu/haub/ruckelshaus-institute/collaborative-solutions/thunder-basin/index.html>
- November 2016, the Governor of Wyoming and the Directors of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Wyoming Office of State Lands and Investments and the Wyoming Department of Agriculture sent letters informing the USFS that agencies did not support reintroduction and current prairie dog management implementation.
- In 2017 Plague reduced prairie dog numbers. Before the Plague outbreak, prairie dog densities were very high and considered to be at socially unacceptable levels.

- In November 2017 the USFWS, USFS and the Department signed an Interagency Statement that the reintroduction of ferrets was not appropriate at that time and that the agencies should continue to focus prairie dog management actions on boundary control and disease control.
- Currently the USFS is working with the Wyoming Department of Agriculture to take further steps on this issue by holding monthly meetings to discuss a forest plan revision before the end of 2018.
 - NGOs support ferret reintroduced on the TBNG.
 - While ferrets have been associated with “unacceptable” prairie dog management, there is still some landowner support for ferret reintroduction.
- The Department, the Wyoming Department of Agriculture, the Service, and USFS publically stated that they do not support ferret reintroduction until ongoing public issues are resolved.
 - Currently there are no plans to reintroduce ferrets to Thunder Basin Grasslands. The draft ferret management plan developed by the WGFD calls for a population of ferrets in black-tailed prairie dog habitat. The location of this population is not predetermined.
 - While the TBNG contains high quality ferret habitat, reintroductions will not occur until social concerns are resolved.
 - Should ferret populations be released, dedicated funding is essential for boundary and plague control.
 - Any releases should be conducted with community support.